

Before You Read

Harlem by Langston Hughes

LITERARY FOCUS: MOOD

The general feeling created in a piece of writing is called its **mood**. This mood, or atmosphere, is created by all the elements of the text: diction, or word choice; sounds; images; and figures of speech. Often, the mood of a text can be summed up in one word—gloomy, joyful, fearful, ominous, mysterious.

Setting the Mood Sometimes just the setting of a text is enough to establish a mood. The chart below lists three settings. In the right-hand column, fill in the mood you would expect from each setting.

Setting	Mood
A dark castle	
A sunny beach	
High mountain peaks	

REVIEW SKILLS

As you read “Harlem,” think about the following literary element.

THEME

The insight about human life revealed in a work of literature. Writers rarely state themes directly. Readers must infer the theme by thinking carefully about all the details in the text: diction, mood, sounds, images, figures of speech.

READING SKILLS: IDENTIFYING HISTORICAL THEMES

Certain themes occur again and again during certain historical periods. During the American Revolutionary period, for example, writers often explored themes of freedom or identity. These themes reflected the optimistic, rational views of the time.

“Harlem,” on the other hand, was written during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when millions of Americans faced severe economic problems. The number of people without jobs rose from four million to twelve million between 1930 and 1932. Many people who still had jobs worked fewer hours for less pay. It was a time when even a one-cent price increase meant that many people couldn’t afford bread. Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City inhabited primarily by African Americans, was hit hard by the Depression. As you read the following poem, notice how it relates to the concerns of that historical period.



Literary Skills

Understand mood.

Reading Skills

Identify historical themes.

Review Skills

Understand theme.

Harlem

Langston Hughes

INTERPRET

Underline details that help create the **mood** in lines 1–6. Describe this mood in your own words.

IDENTIFY

In lines 7–15, underline details that show the economic effects of the Depression. Circle details that show the effects of discrimination.

INTERPRET

Circle the **metaphor** in line 17 that repeats the metaphor in line 1. What does this figure of speech tell you about life in Harlem during this historical period?

ANALYZE

How would you state the **theme** of this poem? (*Review Skill*)

Here on the edge of hell

Stands Harlem—

Remembering the old lies,

The old kicks in the back,

5 The old “Be patient”

They told us before.

Sure, we remember.

Now when the man at the corner store

Says sugar’s gone up another two cents,

10 And bread one,

And there’s a new tax on cigarettes—

We remember the job we never had,

Never could get,

And can’t have now

15 Because we’re colored.

So we stand here

On the edge of hell

In Harlem

And look out on the world

20 And wonder

What we’re gonna do

In the face of what

We remember.

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Harlem

Reading Skills: Identifying Historical Themes The poem “Harlem” reflects the themes and issues of the historical period we call the Great Depression. The chart below lists details from the poem. In the right-hand column, fill in the historical themes or issues these details illustrate.

Details from “Harlem”	Historical Theme or Issue
<p>“Remembering the old lies, / The old kicks in the back, / The old ‘Be patient’ / They told us before.” (lines 3–6)</p>	
<p>“. . . the man at the corner store / Says sugar’s gone up another two cents, / And bread one,” (lines 8–10)</p>	
<p>“We remember the job we never had, / Never could get, / And can’t have now / Because we’re colored.” (lines 12–15)</p>	

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Harlem by Langston Hughes

LITERARY FOCUS: MOOD

The general feeling created in a piece of writing is called its **mood**. This mood, or atmosphere, is created by all the elements of the text: diction, or word choice; sounds; images; and figures of speech. Often, the mood of a text can be summed up in one word—gloomy, joyful, fearful, ominous, mysterious.

Setting the Mood Sometimes just the setting of a text is enough to establish a mood. The chart below lists three settings. In the right-hand column, fill in the mood you would expect from each setting. **Possible responses appear below.**

Setting	Mood
A dark castle	scary
A sunny beach	happy
High mountain peaks	majestic

READING SKILLS: IDENTIFYING HISTORICAL THEMES

Certain themes occur again and again during certain historical periods. During the American Revolutionary period, for example, writers often explored themes of freedom or identity. These themes reflected the optimistic, rational views of the time.

"Harlem," on the other hand, was written during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when millions of Americans faced severe economic problems. The number of people without jobs rose from four million to twelve million between 1930 and 1932. Many people who still had jobs worked fewer hours for less pay. It was a time when even a one-cent price increase meant that many people couldn't afford bread. Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City inhabited primarily by African Americans, was hit hard by the Depression. As you read the following poem, notice how it relates to the concerns of that historical period.

REVIEW SKILLS

As you read "Harlem," think about the following literary element.

THEME

The insight about a work of literature. Writers rarely state themes directly. Instead, they carefully think about all the details in the text: characters, words, images, figures of speech.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills
Understand mood.
Reading
Identify historical themes.
Review Skills
Understand theme.

Harlem 259

SKILLS PRACTICE

The Death of the Hired Man

Reading Skills: Drawing Inferences You can draw inferences about characters based on what they say, on what they do, and on what others say about them. The chart below lists some of the things Mary and Warren say in "The Death of the Hired Man." In the right-hand column, write what you infer about Mary, Warren, and Silas, based on the dialogue quoted here. **Possible responses appear below.**

Dialogue from the Poem	Inference About Character
"But I'll not have the fellow back," he said, "I told him so last haying, didn't I? If he left then, I said, that ended it." (lines 12–14)	Warren: He is stubborn and stern.
"Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man / Some humble way to save his self-respect." (lines 49–50)	Mary: She is compassionate and kind.
"He never did a thing so very bad. / He don't know why he isn't quite as good / As anybody. / Worthless though he is, / He won't be made ashamed to please his brother." (lines 142–145)	Silas: He is unsuccessful but proud.

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258 Part 1 Collection 5: The Moderns

Harlem

Langston Hughes

Here on the edge of hell
 Stands Harlem—
 Remembering the old lies,
 The old kicks in the back,
 The old “Be patient”
 They told us before.

Sure, we remember.
 Now when the man at the corner store
 Says sugar’s gone up another two cents,
 And bread one,
 And there’s a new tax on cigarettes—
 We remember (the job we never had,
 Never could get,
 And can’t have now
 Because we’re colored.

So we stand here
 On the (edge of hell)
 In Harlem
 And look out on the world
 And wonder
 What we’re gonna do
 In the face of what
 We remember.

INTERPRET

Underline details that help create the mood in lines 1–6. Describe this mood in your own words.

The mood is bleak and despairing.

IDENTIFY

In lines 7–15, underline details that show the economic effects of the Depression. Circle details that show the effects of discrimination.

INTERPRET

Circle the metaphor in line 17 that repeats the metaphor in line 1. What does this figure of speech tell you about life in Harlem during this historical period?

It was miserable.

ANALYZE

How would you state the theme of this poem? (Review Skill)

Poverty and discrimination can create hopelessness and bitterness.

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SKILLS PRACTICE
Harlem

Reading Skills: Identifying Historical Themes The poem “Harlem” reflects the themes and issues of the historical period we call the Great Depression. The chart below lists details from the poem. In the right-hand column, fill in the historical themes or issues these details illustrate.

Details from “Harlem”	Historical Theme or Issue
“Remembering the old lies, / The old kicks in the back, / The old ‘Be patient’ / They told us before.” (lines 3–6)	African Americans have been oppressed, cheated, and lied to.
“... the man at the corner store / Says sugar’s gone up another two cents, / And bread one.” (lines 8–10)	Banks closed, stocks crashed, jobs vanished, and people didn’t have enough money for food.
“We remember the job we never had, / Never could get, / And can’t have now / Because we’re colored.” (lines 12–15)	African Americans couldn’t get jobs because of discrimination.

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Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Selection: _____ Author: _____

Rhythm

Rhythm is a musical quality—a rise and fall of voice—produced by the repetition of stressed and unstressed syllables or sounds or by the repetition of other sound patterns.

DIRECTIONS: Review the definitions of meters and scanning below. Then, read the selection and answer the questions about rhythm.

Meter is a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Types of metric feet are the **iamb** (an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable: $\sim \prime$), **trochee** (a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable: $\prime \sim$), **anapest** (two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable: $\sim \sim \prime$), **dactyl** (one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables: $\prime \sim \sim$), and **spondee** (two stressed syllables: $\prime \prime$).

Scanning is the act of marking the pattern of stressed syllables with the symbol \prime and unstressed syllables with the symbol \sim .

1. Write out and scan a line of the poem. _____

2. Does the poem have a regular meter? If so, what type of meter is it? _____

3. If the poem does not have a regular meter, as in free verse, what other types of sound patterns—such as repetition, pauses, line and word length—give it rhythm?

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